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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA HOSTS 4TH INFORMAL BALKANS SUMMIT

[1](#)1. Summary: The Austrian Government and the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe hosted leaders from six southeastern European countries from 2-3 August for the 4th informal "Balkans Summit." Participants discussed the region's expectations for EU membership, establishing a common trade zone (an expanded CEFTA), encouraging more direct investment, and intensifying regional cooperation in law enforcement and humanitarian areas. Austria promised to make rapprochement between the EU and southeastern Europe a permanent theme during its upcoming EU Presidency in the first half of 2006. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik reiterated Austria's strong support for Croatian EU membership. End Summary.

[1](#)2. Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel and Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik welcomed Prime Ministers from Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro to the 4th informal Balkans Summit on August 2-3, 2005. Stability Pact Coordinator (and former Austrian Vice-Chancellor) Erhard Busek also attended the gathering. According to Schuessel and press reporting, discussion focused on EU membership perspectives for the countries of the region and expectations of support from the Austrian EU Presidency during the first half of 2006. The ministers also discussed creating a free trade zone by expanding the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), increasing incentives to attract more direct investment, and intensifying regional cooperation in the areas of law enforcement and humanitarian relief.

[1](#)3. Foreign Minister Plassnik promised to make EU perspectives for southeastern European countries "a permanent theme" of Austria's EU presidency in 2006. In this context, Macedonian PM Vlado Buckovski said, "it is important that during Austria's EU Presidency the door toward Europe be pushed open for all Balkan countries." Plassnik left no doubt about Austria's strong support for Croatian EU membership, emphasizing that "Croatia's path to EU membership serves as a model for its neighbors in the region." Croatian PM Ivo Sanader underlined his country's request to begin accession talks with the EU as soon as possible.

[1](#)4. EU Stability Pact Coordinator Busek highlighted the

economic progress of the region, noting that trade in the region has doubled since the end of armed conflicts in the area. Chancellor Schuessel said the meeting was also about the "reinvention of Europe," a process in which "countries of the region would find their place in Europe again after a turbulent past."

van Voorst